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GITA advancing \$200M telecom upgrade project

The Business Journal of Phoenix - June 2, 2006 by [Adam Kress](#) The Business Journal

Knee-deep in the largest telecom project in the state's history, the **Government Information Technology Agency** has received a 10-year extension from the Arizona Legislature.

The extension comes as GITA continues to guide an overhaul of the Arizona government's telecom infrastructure. The agency was created in 1996 to help improve information technology capabilities within state government. Its 21 employees work with an annual budget of about \$2.5 million.

For more than a year, GITA has been overseeing a \$200 million overhaul of the state's telecom infrastructure. **Accenture Ltd.** was awarded the state contract for the telecom revamp and is about one year into a five-year commitment. It receives the majority of the \$40 million annually appropriated by the state during each of the five years for the project.

For the past year, the state and Accenture have been working to get the Arizona's 118 agencies, boards and commissions all on the same page before rolling out new technology.

In the past, the state's myriad agencies used an unorganized mish-mash of different Internet service providers, phone carriers and other service providers.

The first major piece of the project, which is being rolled out in July, will connect 80 state offices to a shared broadband fiber network.

"This is going to provide a whole new level of security," said Steve Demarest, project director for Accenture. "It used to be every agency for themselves."

This massive project eventually will touch more than 40,000 state employees and could save the state more than \$20 million over a five-year period. The undertaking was born out of a piece of legislation from the 2003 session calling for the privatization of state telecom service.

"Over time, we hope to see cost savings and more efficiency," said GITA Director Chris Cummiskey. "But also better service to our customers, the citizens of the state."

Demarest said after the first portion of the new broadband network is in place, another aspect of the project will involve installing a huge number of new phones.

"Over the next six months, we're going to deploy about 5,000 new VoIP phones," he said. "Over the next 24 months, we'll install about 25,000 of these new phones."

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The VoIP phones allow calls to be made over the Internet and are expected to create significant savings for the state in phone service.

In addition to the state telecom overhaul, GITA has its eye on other projects. The agency is set to launch a 2-1-1 phone service this summer, designed mainly to provide up-to-the-minute emergency information related to forest fires. A Web site, **www.az211.gov**, was launched last year to provide such information.

"We'll have 48 operators on the phones to start," Cummiskey said. "They will provide evacuation and road closure info, etc."

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Government Information Technology Agency: **www.azgita.gov**.

Accenture Ltd.: **www.accenture.com**.

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